

REPUBLIC OF KENYA



THE PRESIDENCY

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY HON. UHURU KENYATTA, C.G.H., PRESIDENT AND COMMANDER IN CHIEF-OF-THE DEFENCE FORCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 12th COMMONWEALTH WOMEN AFFAIRS MINISTERS' MEETING ON 19TH SEPTEMBER, 2019, MOVENPICK HOTEL, NAIROBI, KENYA

Baroness Patricia Janet Scotland, Secretary General of the Commonwealth of Nations;

The Deputy President of the Republic of Kenya, Dr. William Ruto;

Ministers and Heads of Delegations from Commonwealth Countries;

Ministers from the Republic of Kenya;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen;

Let me start by welcoming you to Kenya, the land of possibilities and magical sights. Welcome home Baroness Patricia Janet Scotland, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth of Nations, Honorable Ministers, and all distinguished guests.

Kenya is honored to host this 12th Commonwealth Women Affairs Ministers' Meeting (the 12th WAMM). On behalf of the people of Kenya, I register my appreciation to the Commonwealth for bestowing the privilege to Kenya to host this meeting for the second time. We are welcoming WAMM back to Nairobi, its place of inception in 1985. Your choice of Nairobi is an indication of the confidence you have in our country in convening successful regional and international events. Indeed, we have at your disposal excellent and conducive facilities that will enable purposeful deliberations for the attainment of realistic outcomes for the benefit of all the Commonwealth member states.

I am aware that this meeting has been preceded by two notable events: the Civil Society roundtable convened by the Commonwealth Foundation, and the Senior Officers' Meeting, all which will contribute to the key outcomes of the 12th WAMM.

Honorable Ministers,

The strength of the Commonwealth lies in the combination of its diversity and shared inheritance. This is particularly so because we share similar systems and institutions, common legal processes and a common language. Since its creation, the Commonwealth has made a lasting impact on many fronts, including promotion of peace, democracy and trade. This has presented relative advantage to commonwealth member states in

many respects. It is about time we utilized “**The Commonwealth Advantage**” to accelerate gender equality and empowerment of women and girls within the gender priorities set forth by the Commonwealth. Opportunities abound in the realms of women leadership, women economic empowerment, ending violence against women and girls, and in gender and climate change.

These priorities are in convergence with other global processes which many of our member states are undertaking as envisioned in the Global Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals, as well as other global, regional and national commitments that address the important subject of gender equality and overall empowerment of women.

Since the first global United Nations Women’s meeting held in Mexico in 1975; followed by Copenhagen in 1980; Nairobi in 1985; and Beijing in 1995, we have learnt important lessons in empowering women and girls. We have learnt that progress for women and girls is progress for all. Most importantly, we are converted to the firm conviction that sustainable development can never be achieved when more than half of humanity is left out in building our nations. In line with the Beijing platform for action, and the Global 2030 agenda espoused in the Sustainable Development Goals, the 12th WAMM is strategic as well as practical.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Commonwealth member states have made significant milestones towards gender equality. For instance, with respect to inclusivity at decision-making levels, one third of Commonwealth countries have successfully achieved and surpassed the 30 per

cent global target of representation in parliaments, cabinets, and provincial and local governments.

I am therefore encouraged by the theme of this meeting: ***From Commitment to Action: Accelerating Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment for Sustainable Development.***

The theme is timely as it calls on us to move towards strengthening the implementation and effective monitoring of the various commitments that we have made on gender equality and women's empowerment.

I am equally pleased to note that this meeting will build synergies with the on-going review of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action in readiness for the commemoration of the 25th anniversary in 2020. This meeting further provides an opportunity for revisiting the promises made 25 years ago during the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). In marking the 25th anniversary of the ICPD, Kenya is honoured to host the ICPD+25 conference jointly with the Kingdom of Denmark and United Nations Population Fund.

This 12thWAMM is therefore significant to Kenya and the Commonwealth family as it provides us with a unique platform and opportunity to make important resolutions in meeting our goals as the commonwealth family.

First, it provides a platform to share proposed Commonwealth priorities on gender equality and women's rights in the period of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Secondly we can discuss emerging issues critical to progress in gender equality, women's empowerment and development.

Thirdly, we can reposition the Commonwealth and its commitments to gender equality and women's rights, women's leadership, inclusive development and democracy.

Fourthly we can strengthen intergenerational partnerships for sustainable development and end violence against women and girls.

Honorable Ministers,

In Kenya, Gender Equality remains central to the development agenda of my Government and is enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya. Various constitutional, legal and policy frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination. Our development blueprint Kenya Vision 2030, outlines flagship projects for the promotion of gender equality, Inclusive Economic Growth, Prevention and Response to Gender Based Violence, Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and other harmful practices, Gender Mainstreaming and empowerment of the girl child. More specifically we have embarked on programs to address challenges in specific areas. Allow me to share some of these initiatives.

With respect to ***Women's Economic Empowerment***, Kenya has made significant progress by banking on the goodwill of the State and non-state actors. Financial Commercial institutions have developed tailor-made and customized products for women entrepreneurs. My Government has continued to strengthen affirmative funds that issue low interest capital funding to enterprises owned by women, youth and people with disability.

Our Social Protection Cash Transfer schemes have benefited many women thus spurring household incomes, micro

enterprises, and economic growth and given the beneficiaries a life of dignity and respect.

On education Kenya has experienced tremendous growth on interest and performance of girls and women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics subjects and related career fields. For instance, in 2017, there were 21,400 professional women employed in the science and technical fields representing a 10.8 percent increase from the previous year. In keeping with our resolve to keep girls in school, my Government avails sanitary towels to girls in public primary, special and secondary schools. In 2018 the program reached 3.72 million girls and aims to reach 4.2 million girls this year.

My government has introduced a program to ensure 100% transition from primary to secondary school. As a result, over 90% of all students have proceeded from primary to secondary education through full government sponsorship

On women in leadership, Kenya has made notable progress where women representation in parliament has reached 25 percent which is an improvement from previous composition that was below 10 percent. Although we have not reached the threshold, my Government is relentless in ensuring the not more than two thirds constitutional gender principle is achieved despite challenges faced. My personal commitment and that of my administration to this cause is well documented. For the first time in the history of Kenya my administration appointed the highest number of women to the cabinet. More significantly, they serve in dockets that were previously a preserve of men, including Defense, Public Service, Health and Foreign affairs.

With respect to ***Ending Violence against women and girls***, my government has developed robust policies and laws that seek

to prevent and respond to gender-based violence premised on Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Partnerships and Programing.

With regard to ***Women and Climate Change*** we have invested in climate smart agriculture. For those in distress, we have introduced the hunger safety net that avails US Dollars 50 a month to food stressed households.

In health, my government has introduced ***Affordable Health Care*** through our national priority agenda of ***Big Four Agenda***. Notable is a maternal health programme dubbed "*Linda Mama*" (Protect the Mother), a public funded health scheme that ensures quality and affordable health services for pregnant women and infants. We have also expanded specific health services for women and girls including sexual and reproductive health services, mental and maternal health and HIV services. These interventions have borne fruit and increased life expectancy at birth from 60.28 ten years ago to 67.3 years in 2018.

As a country we have continually made progress in human development from a human development index of 0.57 in 2013 to 0.585 in 2017 and 0.590 in 2018.

Distinguished Guests,

As a country, we have our fair share of challenges in our quest for a more gender equitable society. Our patriarchal socio-cultural system continues to be the bane of our negative gender norms. In 2018, for instance, Kenya posted a gender inequality index (GII) of 0.549 at position 137 as compared to our regional neighbour Zambia which scored a GII of 0.517 at position 125. The challenges faced in Kenya are similar to those experienced by some other Commonwealth States. This platform for Women Affairs Ministers under the Commonwealth is therefore useful for sharing best practices from among the Commonwealth nations in

addressing the challenges we face towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I conclude my remarks, allow me to reiterate that although we have made notable progress in our goal of women empowerment as member states of the commonwealth, we still have some ways to go in this journey. However, drawing from the strength that we harness as the commonwealth family we can share through this platform and hasten our progress by adopting best practices and upscaling our interventions to realize our goals of women empowerment and gender equality. This is an opportune moment to take stock, and together propose practical solutions. It is my hope that the 12th WAMM will determine a connected Commonwealth position for accelerating progress on gender equality in the final decade to 2030.

As a committed commonwealth member state, Kenya stands with all other Commonwealth member states and remain faithful to our obligations to implementing global, regional and national commitments to promote equal access to development opportunities for all.

Finally dear delegates, may I once again welcome you to Kenya and urge you to feel at home and take time to enjoy the hospitality and warmth of the Kenyan people in our Beautiful City in the Sun, Nairobi.

I wish you fruitful and productive discussions.

Ahsanteni, Thank you